



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation
Bethesda Chevy Chase Regional Services Center
June 29, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on health and well-being in partnership with the Bethesda Chevy Chase Regional Services Center Health Committee on Monday, June 29, 2015. The conversation took place from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm in Bethesda, MD. There were 8 participants. The conversation was facilitated by Nancy Martin.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being at the individual and community levels, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Due to the size of the group, there was one discussion instead of break out groups. Participants were offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing.

Defining Health and Well-Being

The group began its discussion by defining “healthy” for an individual. The group description emphasized social-emotional and physical well-being (i.e., more than the absence of illness), including being physically active, mentally healthy, and generally being able to achieve one’s potential. The group then worked to describe a healthy community, emphasizing the importance of individual health for everyone as already described, as well as indicators of a well-functioning society, such as sound management practice, fair distribution of resources, a sense of justice, adequate infrastructure, supports for families, a safe environment for children (including safe transportation), a clean environment (water, air), adequate nutrition for all, and attention to language barriers to service utilization.

Assets that Support Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed community opportunities and assets of Montgomery County that allow for health and well-being, emphasizing the strengths detailed below.

Montgomery County is a well-resourced community in a context conducive to residents’ health and well-being.

- Montgomery County is part of the larger Washington, DC Metro area, with all the resources that brings (e.g., Metro, universities, federal government, and even international connections).
- Montgomery County is financially and intellectually strong, with a population that is, on average, financially prosperous and highly educated and a fiscally strong County budget.



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- Montgomery County attracts residents due to its excellent housing and education offerings, as well as low crime rate.
- Montgomery College has a strong community college system that serves many County residents.
- Montgomery County is home to the headquarters of 4-5 Fortune 500 companies.
- Montgomery County property values have generally remained stable, even as other areas in the region have experienced a dip in home values.
- Montgomery County is invested in school-based healthcare.
- The Metropolitan Washington area has a high number of top-notch healthcare practitioners and hospitals.
- Montgomery County is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.
- Montgomery County is exploring the use of Senior Villages to assist older residents interested in aging in place.
- Montgomery County is racially and ethnically diverse.
- Montgomery County is a community that is appreciative of its diversity and cares about everyone.
- Montgomery County has a culture of citizen input and advocacy.
- MC residents have high life expectancy and low infant mortality rates compared to other U.S. counties.
- Montgomery County has many walkable areas.
- Montgomery County has an Agricultural Reserve.

Montgomery County offers high-quality programming and services and encourages citizen participation.

- Montgomery County's public schools are high quality.
- Montgomery County has an extensive park system.
- Montgomery County has an extensive and well-resourced library system.
- Montgomery County has strong police and fire & rescue departments.
- Montgomery County has excellent road and public transportation systems.
- Montgomery County's government is responsive and seeks citizen input, including through its many citizen committees.
- Montgomery County offers excellent recreation services and many well-maintained parks.

Barriers to Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed obstacles to optimal health and well-being in Montgomery County, emphasizing the challenges detailed below.

Because Montgomery County has many resources, this can lead to a misperception that everyone is wealthy and that everyone has access to those resources.

- Access to affordable housing, mental health and disability services are major challenges for many residents.
- Access to quality care and housing can be difficult for the elderly.
- High property values mean high property taxes, and this can be a hardship on many County residents.



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- There is a lack of enough services for the significant number of people in Montgomery County who are homeless.

Montgomery County could do more to address some fundamental challenges for residents.

- Montgomery County has an aging infrastructure not designed to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. Roads, schools, and public transit are over capacity.
- Despite the generally high quality of the public schools, MCPS still battles a significant racial achievement gap.
- Public transit infrastructure generally caters to commuters.
- While some areas in the County are pedestrian friendly, there remain large areas that are dangerous for walkers.
- Despite a responsive government designed to encourage involvement, there is generally low citizen engagement and lack of intimacy with local government overall (e.g., low voter turnout, low familiarity with elected officials).

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

Participants worked to identify specific actions they recommend the County take to improve the health and well-being of the community, including the priorities and other practical suggestions discussed below.

PRIORITIES (mentioned or “voted for” by numerous participants)

1. Offer greater services for people who cannot function independently, including improved outreach and navigation services.
 - Remember that many health issues do not present as physical problems. Mental health problems, for example, can have a significant impact on a person’s ability to succeed in employment.
 - Improve availability, accessibility, and coordination of services.
2. Leverage the Senior Village concept to increase services for the elderly.
 - Recognize the value of senior citizens in the community.
 - Ensure affordable nursing home and adult day care options.
3. Increase the amount of affordable housing.
4. Offer teen mental health and suicide prevention services.
 - The Suicide Prevention Group has potentially scalable models.
 - Consider youth-led models.

OTHER PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS (Not “voted” as priorities)

- Increase the availability of affordable childcare. Consider public daycare options.
- Consider co-location of services.
 - Consider adding adult and child daycare in public spaces such as libraries.
 - Increase awareness of public services already available in multi-purpose locations, such as the regional service centers.



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- Increase infrastructure and safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Have all County (and state) employees use the Maryland Health Insurance Exchange to increase the pool and purchasing power of enrollees.
- Subsidize public transit so it is more affordable.
- Increase public awareness of County services through consistent and direct outreach.
- Work to alleviate language barriers in programming and access to services.
- Actively work to decrease the deer population in the County.

Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, "Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?" A few participants responded to this question and their comments are provided below.

Good moderator. Balanced conversation well. Good input from staff. Inclusive.

Very well presented program.